

# Builders With Brains Plus Courage



Homes for at least half a thousand, where daisies bloomed last spring.

THIS is the story of an ideal home colony which has sprung up almost overnight on the outskirts of Detroit, the nation's greatest motor-making city. Where in the spring there was nothing but a verdant meadow at the edge of a quiet country village, in the fall there is an up-to-the-minute group of nearly one hundred dwellings so artistically beautiful, so well laid out, so prettily surrounded, that they attract daily the admiring gaze of thousands of travelers passing east and west on the speeding trains of the Michigan Central railroad.

"What place is that?" they demand to know.

"Dearborn," they are told.

"But who, in such times, dares to carry out such a program?" is their next question.

"Builders with brains!" is the answer.

There is much talk these days about the housing problem which is vexing nearly all the great cities of the United States. But there is comparatively little work being done to remedy the situation. Theoretical solutions are plentiful. New dwellings are few. Conversation is abundant. Construction is scarce.

Availing themselves of the excuse that "labor is too high," or "materials are too costly," most of those who in the past have seen to it that the cities' homes have kept pace with the cities' increasing populations are today sitting idly by and waiting for that vague and possibly never-to-come period when labor and materials shall be as cheap as they were back in 1914. And meanwhile hundreds of thousands are crowded, uncomfortable, virtually homeless.

But the "Builders with Brains" did not sit by and wait. There was only one way to solve the housing problem, they realized. That was to BUILD, and to build at once, letting the future take care of itself. The result of their decision now shows for itself.

This is how it all came about:

In the big tractor plant of Henry Ford & Son, at the eastern end of Dearborn, there are employed about 4,000 men, most of them family men. They seem to be the marrying sort, these Ford workers—and the early marrying sort. Their prosperity enables them to take on, in their youth, the responsibilities which have to be deferred until later years by most men.

They wanted homes, needed homes. Somehow or other they were being accommodated in Detroit, but not as they wanted to be. That city is developing so

fast industrially and so slowly in the way of building, that it is probably the most overcrowded community in the land. What these Dearborn workers wished for—though there seemed no realization of their wish in view—were homes of their own, not rented but bought by themselves, and homes, if possible, in or near the village where their work was to be done. They wanted to be right there, not an hour away by crowded street cars.

Sensing this situation, some of those closely associated with Mr. Ford in the management of his affairs made up their minds that they would try to fill the want. The manufacturer himself gave his hearty approval to this ambition, though he did not enter into the practical working-out of the plan. This was for the reason that he wanted it to succeed without him. If he alone were to carry out the idea of building a community to order, the world might say, naturally: "Oh, well, no wonder! Ford did it! He can do anything!" He wanted his associates to go through with the project minus his efforts, and thus prove that home-building could and should be successfully carried on right now. He wanted their success—if the plan should succeed—to inspire others throughout the nation.

So the Dearborn Realty & Construction Company was formed. This concern, it must be plainly understood, was organized with no charitable ideas. It did not purpose to turn out a "factory village," which usually means the slinging together of a few rows of houses all alike and all jammed against each other, in which factory workers are more or less obliged to live and pay rent to their employer. Nor was it this company's idea to sell houses for exactly what they cost.

The plan was to erect the best-looking, best-constructed, longest-lasting homes possible within the financial limitations of well-paid working men, and then sell them to the workers on the most reasonable terms possible—but with a profit.

Success has come to the little group that had the courage of its convictions. Though it was not until well into May last that the preliminary turning of earth was begun in the West Dearborn meadow, by November 1 most of the ninety-four homes forming the first group to be built by the company were complete and many of them were occupied by happy tenants. All of them had been bespoken.

Standing on sodded terraces, facing grass-bordered sidewalks of cement and concreted streets, with their electric lights and their telephones installed, their furnaces glowing against the cool fall evenings, those that were occupied were genuine HOMES, not merely houses. They were homes of which any man of moderate means might well be proud. By the first of the year the whole ninety-four will undoubtedly be furnished and inhabited, and the "builders with brains" will be considering future plans of much greater magnitude.

Both builders and purchasers are satisfied. The former have done a good turn for their community as well as made a fair profit; the latter are enjoying that deep happiness which comes only from the possession of one's own abode.

Those responsible for the new community have been referred to here as "Builders with Brains." The exact truth is that they were really not "builders" at all—that is, house-builders—by profession, but they had brains enough to put through any sort of a constructive program.

The directing genius of the proposition was a young man who is intimately associated with Mr. Ford in all his enterprises. Though he wasn't trained as a builder,

but rather along financial lines, he had previously built a \$4,000,000 hospital for the motor and tractor manufacturer in Detroit, and this is pointed out as the finest institution of its kind in existence. He did this by first finding out what hospitals were like and how hospital-builders did their work—and then improving upon both the structures and the methods. So the mere fact that he wasn't regularly a builder did not deter him from tackling the job of constructing an entire village.

A young architect of ability was next engaged, the same, indeed, who under the executive's direction had designed the hospital. The architect was simply told that what was wanted was a group of houses of sufficiently different appearance to avoid the suggestion that they were "machine-made," so to speak. That was one specification. Another was that they must be of a size suitable to accommodate the average family in ample comfort. A third was that they must be of the best available materials and the solidest sort of construction. His job, in fact, was to design houses that should be good to look at, good enough for anyone to live in, and good for many years' wear and tear. He went at it with enthusiasm.

The third active participant in the company was a bank cashier, whose duty it was to take care of the financial details, which are many, for the houses are sold on partial payments, though by a system that is simple as well as equitable.

"Go-getters"—it didn't make any difference whether they had building experience or not provided they were the sort who would tackle any job—were chosen for the subordinate parts, and in May actual construction was begun.

THE company purchased land sufficient for 312 lots, each 50 by 125 feet. That measurement is far more liberal than the average building lot. But then, it was intended that in every respect the purchasers of these lots and homes should be treated far more liberally than usual.

It was decided to lay out at first two streets lengthwise of the property, each 1,700 feet long, with one cross-street bisecting these midway. The long streets run east and west. The first of these was called Park Avenue, because the north side of it, facing the tracks of the Michigan Central railroad, was to be made into



A Dearborn favorite.



Roomy—airy—smart!